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## OVER-ILLUSTRATION.

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THE pictorial embellishment of books is by no means a modern device. The first attempts at the preservation of thoughts, of facts, and of events, or at the perpetuation and enforcement of religious opinions, were symbolical, or literally figurative. Illustration began upon the walls of temples or of tombs, and, without the adjunct of a typographical text, spoke to future generations of the great unprinted book of human life. Those who, with much painstaking, resorted to drawing, had a double purpose. There was the immediate gratification of the eye, but there was also that indefinable desire to be remembered, and to be known even to the end of time, which of all animals, so far as we know, man alone possesses. Painting and drawing supplemented architecture and sculpture. All faith seeks an outward and formal expression, and all mythologies tend to a material exposition. This is often employed long after its original significance has passed into oblivion, and modern Christianity sometimes uses types that had their origin in Egypt and in India centuries before the monotheistic idea was developed by the patriarchs and prophets. To most these types are esoteric, and have hardly the suggestion even of an exoteric meaning; and it is not improbable that we are now employing some symbols of our own device which in the far-off future will be entirely unintelligible. As the world becomes more and more venerable, we may be Egyptians or Assyrians to our distant successors.

Picture illustration belongs to the infancy of modern literature. The block-books were first without text, or the text was on the same page with the picture. Generally there was no lettering except such as sufficed for an explanation of the subject. The block-books, combining text and illustration, naturally followed. Here, too, the pictures were the important and prominent

part of the book. Many of them were such books as were made for children in the last century. The prints were unideal, rude, and incongruous, but after a fashion they told the story. Almost all of them were religious. Many of them were simply childish, although they were intended, undoubtedly, for adults. Sometimes the print was on a single sheet. It is thought that these books were originally designed as suggestions of subjects to the ignorant clergy, but they were soon found in the hands of the people. As the text, when there was any, was always in Latin, it was of no value to them. The story was told by the picture. These books were of no use to men of letters, and occupied something like the position of the dime novel, or the lower class of illustrated newspapers, of the present day. Sometimes the pictures were printed and the text written. After the block-books were given up, these pictures were frequently used for ornamenting typographic work. This combination of letterpress and pictures, coeval with the discovery of printing, though passing through many fluctuations of public taste, has never been entirely abandoned. The Bible, and books of travel, poetry, and romance, were continually and profusely illustrated. Small volumes of limited cost had copper frontispieces and title-pages. The Lykens Bible, printed in the sixteenth century, had almost as many pictures as Doré's. No chap-book was so poor and rude as not to have one or two prints, however inartistic. Prayer-books for the people were almost always thus illustrated, if not enriched. Certain wood-engravings, having become popular, were used year after year, until they were incapable of any further service. The pictorial adornment of all important English books during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was upon a careful and liberal if not an extensive scale, the coppers being often on the same page with the text. Cave's "*Lives of the Apostles*" (1676) has, besides a full-page copper frontispiece, a folding copper of two pages, with twenty-eight smaller copies printed upon the page. If a poem like "*Hudibras*" was to be reprinted, an artist like Hogarth was employed to illustrate it. Very rich authors could print as sumptuously as they pleased. A copy (two volumes, 1729) of the works of Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, has a noble folding portrait of that author, engraved by Vertue after Kneller, another large plate of the poet's monument, engraved by Foudrinier, and twenty smaller coppers (including initial letters) worked on the printed

page, unsigned, but probably also by Foudrinier. To come down to modern times, "The Hermit of Warkworth," by Bishop Percy (1771), a mere pamphlet of fifty-two pages, has a beautiful copper by Taylor, printed on the title-page, and the lettering tells us that this was executed through the liberality of the Duke of Northumberland. A "Dissertation on Oriental Gardening," by Sir William Chambers (1772), a pamphlet of ninety-two pages, has a fine copper on the title-page designed by Cipriani, and engraved by F. Bartolozzi, with two smaller prints by that engraver; and the whole dedication to the King is engraved on copper — "very pretty prints," as the author calls them in a letter to Voltaire, while deprecating "the nonsense" of his own writing. We have given these as minor examples of the illustrations of the last century. The English books of that period were sufficiently elegant without carrying pictorial effort too far for good taste and human patience.

It is a noteworthy fact that the first step in the direction of a more profuse illustration should have been backward in the direction of the "Bible for the Poor," and similar ancient productions — the first step, we mean, substantially. In the mere skill exhibited, of course the modern picture-books were infinitely superior, however different upon the point of realism. But in the latest as well as in the earliest time, there was the same concession to the limited intellectual capacity of readers. There could be no books fitted to catch the sixpences of the people without pictures. All the periodicals designed for the patronage of the cottage, of the farm-house, of the manufacturing towns, swarmed with prints. This was the sixteenth century over again. The apology was hardly candid. The real design was to sell the "Penny Magazine"; the pretense was to increase the sense of art among the lower classes. All the workmen were to become cognoscenti, and to be able to tell the difference between an Andrea del Sarto and a Caravaggio. The actual motive was to catch the eye of children of a larger growth. A tolerably well engraved wood-cut after the "Transfiguration" could give no idea of that work specially worth having; no more, in fact, than the most general notion of the composition of the picture. It was not of so much value to the illiterate reader as a description of the work in prose by Mr. Ruskin would be. Yet the Society that printed the "Penny Magazine" is entitled to the credit of a high and honorable aim; and it failed only through

the fallacy of supposing that the eye could be made to do the work of the mind, and that the uneducated, without regard to a hundred adverse conditions, would spring at once to an appreciation of what is greatest in art. The end was, that the device of illustration passed into the hands of those who better understood what such readers wanted, and who could furnish *ad libitum* the coarse, the striking, and the realistic.

The ornamentation of manuscript books in the middle ages, and before the invention of printing, was carried to great elegance and perfection. Although black was the color of ink usually preferred, on account of its greater legibility, texts were written sometimes in blue, purple, green, gold, and silver inks. For the border, pictures, and initials, the work was passed to the designer, and from his hands to those of the illuminator. Mr. De Vinne, in his "Invention of Printing," says: "The gravest truths were hedged in with the most childish conceits. Angels, butterflies, goblins, clowns, birds, snails, and monkeys, sometimes in artistic, much oftener in grotesque, and sometimes in highly offensive positions, are to be found in the illuminated borders of copies of the gospels and the writings of the fathers." This was mere ornamentation, and not illustration; but stories, sometimes from the Scriptures, were embossed upon the leathern covers. Books of love and song were manufactured in a specially dainty manner, for the use of ladies. Illustrations in miniature were produced, and the books were bound with corresponding elegance. Of such books it is hardly necessary to say the prices were often enormous. This style of book-making continued even to the seventeenth century, and for a long time printed books were looked upon as vulgar by fastidious collectors.

We cannot, of course, set aside practical values. There are certain departments of literature and of scientific learning in which an appeal to the eye appears to be necessary, or if not so absolutely, at least it is so convenient that it would be a waste of time and labor not to resort to it. This is true of mathematics, of mechanical demonstrations, of the physical sciences, of manuals of navigation, of maps and charts, and of topographical surveying generally. It is equally true of architecture, and of mensuration and proportion, as applied to machinery. The inventor must draw his plan upon paper before he can construct his working model. In the compilation of encyclopædias, drawings save space and secure accurate comprehension. It is draw-

ing that renders objective teaching on a general scale possible. In natural history, no possible verbal description of birds, of beasts, of reptiles, or of fishes could be either so rapid or so effective as a pictorial representation. In popular philological dictionaries, some engravings have been found useful; while in newspapers, in which space is really valuable, illustrated advertisements have been abandoned. The proprietors of such journals hardly want them at any price, nor would they often repay the advertiser for the large rates demanded. Prints are used, though sparingly, in the advertising supplements of the monthly magazines.

The ordinary purpose of an illustration is to explain, to elucidate, to render clear what is obscure or abstruse; and this is doubtless the secondary object of the pictorial embellishment of works of literary character. Used in this way, it differs from pictures designed to enhance the sumptuousness of a volume, and to increase its typographical elegance and bibliographical value, which now appears to be the primary intention. The writer of a book of travels may not have the faculty, by verbal description, of bringing to the mind of his readers the beauties of a landscape, even if he were sure of that reader's capacity or attention, and so the pictorial is the natural expedient. The glowing pages of Mr. Ruskin attest that a man of genius is not at the mercy of such resources. The more perfect the letterpress, the less it needs graphic aid, whatever may be thought of a purely suggested and ideal treatment of the text. A picture might be made from Shakespeare's description of the Cliff of Dover, but no picture could add to the sense that he awakens of its loftiness. The fishermen walking on the beach like mice, the tall bark diminished to a cock, and especially the surge murmuring so far down as to be inaudible, could not be put into a picture at all, nor would the choughs and crows or the samphire-gatherers tell much upon canvas; nothing of these but mere imitation, the lowest form of art, being available. Not Turner himself could have added anything from his palette to the exquisite opening of the Fifth Book of "*Paradise Lost*"—to the rosy steps of morn advancing, and sowing the earth with orient pearl; nor could there be any painting of the fuming rills and the shrill matin song of birds on every bough. How far can a wood-engraving, or an etching, or steel or copper reproduce a scene where all depends upon sound and color? These

considerations teach us the limits of art, and especially of art as employed in the manufacture of books, the proportions of which also negative any adequate suggestion of the wide, the spacious, or the sublime. Most illustration has the demerits of miniature painting without its merits. Small reproductions of the masters even can hardly do more than assist the memory of those who have been fortunate enough to see the great originals. The idea that we get from them is pinched and inadequate. How thoroughly mechanical and material illustration may become, may be understood by looking over that gigantic failure, Boydell's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," not a single print of which, it is safe to say, ever added one iota either to our enjoyment or comprehension of the poet. We put down the ponderous volume with a feeling of relief, quite tired of the wooden Northcotes and Opies, of Fuseli's epileptic extravagances, and of Benjamin West's commonplaces in paint. It is a remarkable fact that no painter has ever won enduring fame by working from writers, if we except the Bible, which is so much more than any book. The illustrator has a place by himself, and it is not a high one. Even Hogarth could do little or nothing with such a book as "Hudibras," or a great draughtsman like Doré with the Scriptures, or even with Rabelais, whose wonderful genius seems to have been quite past the comprehension of that clever Frenchman. Of what use was the prettiness of Westall to all the poets whose works he spent his life in adorning with nice frontispieces and vignettes? How independent are the best of Bewick's works of the books in which they appeared! His beggars, asses, cattle, peasants, gypsies, and the rest, might all be cut out and put in a portfolio by themselves, without in the least diminishing their interest.

Portraiture is a department of illustration that requires a separate consideration. We love naturally to look upon the faces of distinguished men that are no more to be seen in the flesh; but, to be at all satisfactory, engravings of them must be after originals of decided merit. It is questionable whether we have gained anything in this department of the fine arts by the discovery of photography. The best photographs are only by accident good portraits—hardly one perhaps in a hundred. They give passing moods, and not the whole character. They have a certain uniformity of expression, which, when many of them are gathered together, becomes monotonous and tiresome. All these

figures and faces are upon dress parade, and have an appearance of being looked at. Usually, they exhibit a deplorable lack of *insouciance*, and they might, for anything you see in the faces, be all deaf and dumb. More or less, they have what is insufferable in portraiture, an air of dramatic pose, so that the best photographs taken have been those of actors and of actresses, whose life is one of display whether upon the stage or facing the camera. Yet, singularly enough, even in their characteristic costumes, they look like themselves and not like their characters. If we compare them with drawings of the same class made during the last century, with the fine prints of Garrick as "Abel Drugger," or with the Reynolds portrait of Mrs. Siddons as "The Tragic Muse," we shall discover the difference between mechanical and intellectual work. How different is the production of the human hand from that of the camera, in dramatic portraiture, may be seen by comparing the figures in Bell's "British Theatre" with those of actors and actresses as produced by the photograph. The former are full of the life and spirit of the stage; the latter have no characteristic at all, save that of self-conscious peacock pride of costume, and the possession of physical beauty. And yet Bell's prints are of an inferior pictorial order, compared with such a picture as that of the Kemble family in "Henry VIII.," or with Sir Thomas Lawrence's portrait of Charles Kemble in "Hamlet." Photography is a cheap and convenient resource, but the utmost care and skill cannot make it much better than a manufacture. Its want of originality is a necessity. Its merits are its economy, and the rapidity of execution of which it is capable, together with that superficial fac-simile resemblance which finds favor in uneducated eyes.

Half of illustration is impertinent. It is a suggestion from somebody who is perhaps less fitted than the reader to judge of what he shall admire the most. It is like the irritating comments that stupid folk scribble upon the margins of novels. "Is not Jane lovely?" "Beautiful!" "How brave Charles is!" Reading, to be much more than an amusement, must be an intellectual process, and this is true, to a certain extent, even of reading that is considered to be light. A large majority seek to be amused. If the pictures amuse them more than the text, they will accord the largest proportion of attention to the pictures, reading just closely enough to make them comprehensible. A scene, an action, an event vividly described by the writer, ought of itself to make



a picture in the mind of the reader, and each ought to make his own. They might differ in details, but these are of no importance if only the general spirit of the text be observed. But here the illustrator steps in and makes originality of impression impossible. He takes the work out of the hands of the writer, and dictates to the reader what he shall see. No wonder that writers are often ill-content with the illustration that has been vouchsafed to them. The picture is and can be only one man's notion of what has been described. It is not a translation; it is not even a paraphrase; it is simply a commentary, wise or unwise, which, even if one had been needed, has not supplied the need; and any literature stamped with such characteristics can only enfeeble the mind and pervert the judgment and diminish the ability to read to any purpose.

The instances in which the pencil of the illustrator and the pen of the author can work in perfect accord must necessarily be fortuitous and few. Apart from intellectual difference of kind, and the separate demands made upon the mind, it would be wonderful if there were not usually marked inequality of power. This is so evident in special instances as hardly to require demonstration. If we reconsider Shakespeare, for instance, we find him a perpetual source of illustration. Many pictures have been painted, statues have been suggested, engravings without number produced, pictorial editions of the plays multiplied, yet there has been no distinctly great production. Nobody cuts a marvelous figure in the arena who goes upon crutches at all, and still less he who goes upon borrowed ones. Boydell's Shakespeare is a frightful example. It is wooden and academic from the start. It is the most dismal failure—a failure in design and equally so in execution. Fusali's contributions are a nightmare, and suggestive of delirium tremens. Northcote's and Opie's figures would hardly do for the bows of frigates. The women in Peters's "Merry Wives of Windsor" look, in their lace, as if they had just come out of brothels. There are no illustrations of "Paradise Lost" that are worth a farthing, and almost without exception those of "Don Quixote" are a weariness. Doré's pictures from Rabelais make the book, which was coarse to begin with, coarser still. The artist does not seem to have had the least idea of the meaning of his author, and his illustrations are all unfragrantly redolent of the nineteenth century. Grandville and Tony Johannot are

much better, and the latter's designs for Sterne's "Sentimental Journey" are really bits of genius in their way. Hogarth did one or two clever things for "Tristram Shandy," for "Hudibras," and for Fielding, including the portrait of the immortal novelist which he drew from memory, and for which it is said that Garrick posed. But down almost to the present time, the illustration of literary work was comparatively limited, except in books that were professedly books of design, like Bewick's. But we have drifted back to the days of the *Biblia Pauperum*. This began in the magazines with Maclise's portraits drawn for "Fraser," and was followed by such trash as the "Books of Beauty," the "Drawing-room Scrap-books," and all the parlor-table annuals. The rage for pictures reached the novelists; Cruikshank, Seymour, Kenny Meadows, to mention no others, began to design for books of fiction, and became so important to their success that it is no wonder the first named actually supposed himself, in his old age, to be the author of "Oliver Twist." He was a man of some genius, and did some clever work, but he was not a good draughtsman. He was essentially coarse, and never entirely overcame a tendency to caricature. He lacked imagination, and he could not have drawn a woman if his life had depended upon it, except a woman of the slums and the street. In all his pictures there is not a pretty face, not even of a bar-maid. The "Pickwick Papers," undoubtedly intended to be a letterpress to accompany pictures, were soon made something much more important by the cleverness of Mr. Dickens; and yet he never thoroughly relied upon pictures, and never printed anything without them—fairly good sometimes, sometimes indifferent, and sometimes bad. Mr. Thackeray fell into the habit, in his case confirmed by his personal love of art, of publishing picture-books, sometimes with his own designs, which were usually ill-drawn, and hardly better drawn when he confided the work to Doyle. Meanwhile "Punch" did much to increase the appetite for illustration, which had now become as confirmed as a school-boy's for lollipops; the pictorial newspapers had naturally a great success; and the time came when the public would have nothing without engravings.

Americans followed the example, and began to have their own pictorial newspapers and magazines and their own editions *de luxe* of favorite authors. For a while our work in this way was mediocre or very ill-done. The Philadelphia magazines for a long time printed engravings that would not now be tolerated.

Mr. Bennett scraped some excellent mezzotints for the "New York Mirror," which are now cheap at almost any price. The "Tokens" and "Atlantic Souvenirs," that had really given illustrations of merit, employed the Cheneys, Mr. Dick, and other skilled engravers, with good results; but the annuals were fairly swamped by the flood of cheaply adorned weeklies and monthlies, and disappeared. It is only fair to say that this kind of work has diminished in quantity and improved in quality. The prints in "The Century" and "St. Nicholas" are almost all that could be desired of the kind — well-drawn, well-engraved, and admirably printed. They are instructive, and for those who will not think, they help the text. It is true that they are mannered, and there are so many of them that they become sometimes as wearisome as a book extended from one volume to ten; but it is encouraging to feel that we have at last reached the extreme point, beyond which we can no farther go, unless we give up letterpress altogether.

It may as well be said plainly that this system of illustration is a fashion, and cannot last. In one sense it is aboriginal and savage, if not childish. It bears a close resemblance to the æsthetic craze, which is only a revival of a similar madness in the eighteenth century. Nothing that encourages affectation, or that leads us to be satisfied with the pretty and to forget the great, can promote a real love of art. It is of small use that we admire, though even that is better than to say we admire while knowing nothing about the matter; the main point is, whether an object is worthy of admiration. A man who likes a meretricious picture, and admits his gratification, is so far worthy of praise; but that does nothing for the picture, nor is the man himself less an object of commiseration. Tinsel is tinsel, and fillagree is fillagree, and leather is leather, and prunella is prunella, and will be until the end of time. What good has the picture-card mania (now happily dying out, if not dead) ever done to any human soul? Chromo-lithography was carried to such an extent that at last the popular stomach revolted. The same fate awaits over-illustrated, tawdry, and bright-looking books. People will come back to good plain letterpress, to quiet binding, and to mere frontispieces, with a portrait or so to gratify a reasonable curiosity.

Illustration without text, and confining itself to the expression of an idea or a series of events, at its best may be independent of the letter and tell its own story. The "Dance of Death,"

for instance, needs no explanation. The same is true of many of the scenes of Hogarth — of “*Marriage à la Mode*” and “*The Industrious and the Idle Apprentice*.” The cartoons of Raphael tell their story simply, plainly, and forcibly. But in every publication in which pictures are permitted to dominate, it will be found usually that the original text exhibits a tendency to deterioration. There is evidence of this in “*Punch*,” which has lost almost entirely its literary character. Those who like a plenty of pictures do not much care to read. Great poets and novelists and historians have never depended upon pictorial assistance, nor have the ablest magazines and newspapers.

Caricature, which works not necessarily by distortion, but by an aggravation of personal peculiarities, and by a material parody of serious actions, while in some respects analogous to satire, is not necessarily ill-natured. Its tendency, however, is in that direction. It seizes upon manners, physiognomies, and figures, and does its best to render them ridiculous. Even when simply humorous, and so far good-natured, it is intended to have the effect of a serious argument. Its methods are very old, and were used by the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, in early Christian times, in the Middle Ages, and ever since, by most peoples. Caricature, designed for immediate and popular effect, almost always degenerates into coarseness and exaggeration. It takes the color and shape of those to whom it is addressed. English caricature, for example, has usually a touch in it of the pot-house and the prize-ring. Nothing is left to the imagination. The most dignified personages are represented in the most undignified positions. If there is a play, it is horse-play, and of the roughest. Many of the works of Gilray and Bunbury are indecent and hardly fit for the walls of ale-houses. English caricature during the wars with Napoleon sank into sheer degradation, and became utterly disgusting.

Once in four years, on the recurrence of our national election, our politicians find caricature a cheap and ready expedient, and our shop-windows are full of these satirical lithographs, of which the humor is rather dreary, the point scarcely perceptible, and the general style mediocre. Many of them are such as boys would make upon fences, only a little better drawn. The allusion is generally to some campaign scandal, quite bad enough in cold type, and insufferable in a print, especially if inflamed by color. The caricatures of the newspapers are many of them

strong, if not humorous ; those of " Puck," for instance, showing a decided advance in the art. The main fault of our political caricature is its incongruity. Frequently a scene is presented representing nothing that ever did happen, or ever can in this world. There is no story, no probable action, no simplicity of truth, no propriety of detail. Often there is a want even of drollery. We are expected to laugh, but we find nothing to laugh at. It is like a comic play in a cheap Third avenue theater. The fun is that of Mr. Merryman in the circus. The picture, whatever the skill displayed by the artist, makes no impression ; it is looked at and forgotten.

We trust that in this article we have not been hypercritical. We understand perfectly well the innocent pleasure that cheap pictures give ; but we understand, also, that an indulgence in this taste may be carried too far and may work harm both to the illustrator and the illustrated. We are living in a time remarkable for a want of great writers in several departments of literature, and it may be questioned whether this unpleasant state of things may not be attributed, in part, at least, to the intellectual indolence that a habit of indulgence in mere picture-gazing may have originated and confirmed.

CHARLES T. CONGDON.